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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1815  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 7947  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7980  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 002093

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/11/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: THE DPJ UNDER ICHIRO OZAWA: WHAT TO EXPECT (WHEN  
YOU'RE NOT EXPECTING MUCH)

REF: A. TOKYO 1889  
[1](#)B. TOKYO 1839  
[1](#)C. TOKYO 1824  
[1](#)D. TOKYO 1734

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons: 1.4 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The election of Ichiro Ozawa as leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) could have long-term significance for Japan's political scene, but there will be little or no immediate impact on U.S. interests. Ozawa has created a wide network of contacts throughout a long career and his emergence has the potential to ripple through the Japanese body politic, impacting the selection of the next prime minister, the Upper House election of 2007 and the DPJ's ability to redefine itself as a distinct alternative to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). His experience could also be a double-edged sword in handling the DPJ's internal machinations. End Summary.

What Ozawa Brings to the Table  
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[1](#)2. (C) New Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Ichiro Ozawa's importance in the Japanese political scene cannot be overstated. Love him or hate him -- and most people do -- Ozawa is among Japan's political elite, even if he would prefer to be known as a rebel. In his first days as party president, beginning with his larger-than-expected margin of victory, Ozawa has done nothing to diminish his image as a strong leader. Claiming in his acceptance speech that the future of the two-party system rests on the success of the DPJ, Ozawa pledged his life to reforming it. Since then Ozawa, appearing tirelessly on television, has come out clearly in opposition to PM Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine, spoken out against Koizumi's administrative reform and social safety net plans, and made it clear he will take a more confrontational stance against the LDP. In one week, some argue, he has created a clearer distinction between the DPJ and LDP than either flip-flopping Seiji Maehara or zero-charisma Katsuya Okada were able to accomplish in their terms. In a Yomiuri poll immediately following Ozawa's election, the public support rate for the DPJ jumped from 11.1 percent to 14.0 percent. Fifty-six percent of the public said they expect Ozawa to bring change, while, reflecting the DPJ's low overall image, 40 percent said they do not expect much from him. Of those with expectations, 57 percent say Ozawa's rich in political experience, 28 percent say he's a man of action, another 28 percent say he has leadership ability, and only 6 percent believe he's trustworthy. Following Ozawa's election, PM Koizumi remarked "I think he is tough, because he knows our party well."

## Ozawa's Potential Impact On Koizumi's Successor

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13. (C) The resignation of Maehara as President of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and the rise of Ozawa as his replacement should have little effect on U.S. interests in the short term. Ozawa's emergence, however, has the potential to ripple through the Japanese political scene, beginning with his possible impact on the selection of the next prime minister.

14. (C) According to venerable Kyodo News political reporter Kenji Goto, while the Japanese public views PM Koizumi and Ozawa as near equals in terms of political skill and experience, Ozawa overshadows the two candidates most widely regarded to be Koizumi's successor, Shinzo Abe and Yasuo Fukuda. Although polls continue to show Abe has an overwhelming lead in popularity among the general public (47 percent to Fukuda's 18), Goto felt that Maehara's demise actually hurt Abe. Maehara, who had his own level of popularity before taking on the DPJ president job, proved to be too inexperienced to lead a party. The only question mark over Abe has been whether he has the experience necessary to lead. Fukuda is seen as less skilled than Ozawa in brokering political deals. Should Ozawa be able to gain public support between now and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presidential election in September, Goto said, LDP members will have to take into consideration who could best lead the party against Ozawa into the July 2007 Upper House elections. Most pundits already feel the LDP stands to lose some ground in the 2007 Upper House election, since it will be difficult to match the results of the incumbents' last race in 2001, in which the LDP did surprisingly well on the coattails of then-new PM Koizumi.

## Ozawa's Potential Impact on the LDP

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15. (C) Further complicating Ozawa's impact on the LDP is Ozawa's history with the party and his continuing deep connections with it. To begin with, Ozawa, an LDP member from 1969-1993, was a Tanaka faction member, and still retains ties to LDP Upper House Chairman Mikio Aoki. While Koizumi has been able to pretty well crush the Tanaka-Hashimoto-Tsushima faction within the party, four of the DPJ's top five leaders are former Tanaka faction members: Ozawa, Secretary General Hatoyama, Supreme Advisor Hata, and Diet Affairs Chief Watanabe (Naoto Kan is the exception). Even though modern Japanese political history has revolved around the single-party dynamics of the LDP, with the opposition simply floundering in an anti-LDP role, a critical mass may finally be forming within the opposition that has the connections, know-how and incentive to overtake the LDP.

16. (C) Already Ozawa has caused a stir in the media by meeting with traditional LDP support groups such as the Japan Medical Association and Japan Dental Association, and his April 11 meeting with Soka Gakkai Chairman Akiya "set off alarms in the ruling camp," according to Yomiuri news. Another interesting sidenote is the very close relationship between Ozawa and Shintaro Abe, Shinzo's father. When PM Takeshita wanted Seiroku Kajiyama as his Secretary General back in 1989, it was Shin Kanemaru and Shintaro Abe who supported the 49-year old Ozawa and got him the job.

## Ozawa's Potential Impact on the DPJ

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17. (C) DPJ Upper House member Kazuya Shimba told Poloff recently that Ozawa "was the only possible choice" for members in the April 7 election and, with the exception of the Matsushita Institute quasi-faction of the DPJ -- the young turks such as Maehara, Genba and Edano, who supported Kan -- party members fell in line behind Ozawa. "Because Kan had run the party twice before," Shimba said, "the only way to bring a fresh image to the party was to elect Ozawa." Shimba said he had read in the press that Ozawa's election may drive "Matsushita types" out of the party, leaving Ozawa

with the blame for splitting yet another party, but called such a scenario "impossible." Party members still believe the current configuration of the DPJ remains the best possible vehicle for taking over the reins of government from the LDP. Ozawa immediately calmed some fears within the party by retaining most of Maehara's executive staff.

18. (C) Shimba predicted that the party's September 2006 presidential election would merely be a confidence motion re-electing Ozawa. At that point, Ozawa will likely feel more comfortable about inserting his own people into the party's leadership positions, although he will have to appease traditional party members such as Kan and Maehara to maintain cohesion heading into the next election. Even though the Secretary General has traditionally managed elections for the DPJ, Ozawa has already decided to review Upper House election candidates and manage the election by himself. He will consequently be the face of the DPJ in the July 2007 election. At that point, if the DPJ does well, then the DPJ could again be seen by the public as a possible contender for the reins of government. Should the DPJ actually win a simple majority in the Upper House in 2007 -- Shimba's very optimistic prediction, since the coalition would have to lose over 25 seats to the DPJ -- the playing field would begin to tilt in the DPJ's favor. The DPJ could then claim a mandate and at least disrupt Diet proceedings by sending bills back to the Lower House (where the LDP would still maintain a two-thirds majority). Shimba also said he felt a DPJ Upper House victory could force the LDP to dissolve the Lower House earlier than 2009, although Embassy officers believe it is unlikely the LDP would risk giving away its two-thirds majority prematurely. Comment: Shimba obviously has a vested interest in the outcome he predicts. For it to really happen, however, would require a near perfect political storm in the DPJ's favor. End comment.

#### Ozawa's Potential Impact on U.S. Interests

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19. (C) Ozawa has a long track record of being generally pro-U.S., and there is no reason to believe that will change. During his pre-election speech on April 7, Ozawa reiterated that the U.S.-Japan security treaty remains the pillar of Japan's security policy, and he basically supports U.S. security policy. In the past, Ozawa has been seen to have had good working relationships with many U.S. government officials. We can expect Ozawa, for domestic political purposes, to play opposition politics on issues such as beef and base realignment, but his record suggests that he is too pragmatic and too much of a political animal to allow any issue to have a long-term, debilitating effect on the bilateral relationship. Post expects that Ozawa will likely want to visit the U.S. in the summer of 2006 in order to rebuild his ties, and those of the DPJ, with Washington. SCHIEFFER